DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 330 519 RC 018 068

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TITLE Assessing American Indian Needs in New Mexico.
PUB DATE 90
NOTE 20p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *American Indian Education; American Indians; Children; Early Intervention; Elementary Secondary Education; *High Risk Students; Identification; *Needs Assessment; Prevention; *Student Needs; Test Bias
IDENTIFIERS *Gallup McKinley School District NM; *Navajo (Nation); New Mexico

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on New Mexico's high-risk Indian children and programs. Specifically, Western New Mexico University has been involved with the Gallup/McKinley public school district, the largest school district (5,000 square miles) in the United States (larger than New Jersey) with a school population that is 73% Indian. This paper examines specific Navajo acculturation variables linking to culture conflict, socioeconomic issues creating extreme environmental trauma, and testing bias issues resulting in inappropriate placement decisions. A profile of the high-risk Navajo child is created based on recent research data. This profile includes the following factors: no established language dominance in either English or Navajo, lack of knowledge about Navajo traditions, frequent changes of residence, no community involvement, lack of bonding with either parent, recent divorce or family death, frequent illness in family, parental drug or alcohol abuse, financial support from a public agency, lack of running water and electricity in home, and remote residence with no transportation. In order to identify high-risk children, an adequate assessment should include: (1) giving a comprehensive interview; (2) taking all steps to avoid testing bias; (3) analyzing the child's learning style; and (4) determining the appropriate counseling intervention models. This paper includes 39 references. (SV)

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ASSESSING AMERICAN INDIAN NEEDS IN NEW MEXICO

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Introduction

Located in New Mexico is the historical and cultural foundations of the contemporary Pueblo Indians (19 different Pueblos located within the state), Jicarilla and Mescalero Apache (home to Geronimo's clan), and the Navajo--the single largest U.S. Indian tribe. Indeed, while the Navajo Nation lies within the borders of three states (Arizona, New Mexico, Utah), Gallup, New Mexico is the major off-reservation attraction for both Navajo and area Pueblo (Hopi and Zuni) Indians. National attention was drawn to this phenomenon with the "20/20" documentation (August 18, 1989): focusing on alcoholism problems in the Gallup area.

New Mexico's "Indian problem" has a history that extends to the first white contact in 1540 when Francisco Coronado explored the area. The first group to be exploited was the Pueblo, who with the help of the Apache, rebelled in 1680. Here they captured Santa Fe and drove the Spanish out for twelve years. This successful revolt eventually led to a compromise of Indian and Spanish/Catholic ways. This fusion of cultures is termed "mestizaje.". The merging of cultures eventually extended to the Navajo as well. Accordingly, a mix-breed of Mexican and Indian emerged--mestizos--often the pariahs of the dominant Anglo society. New Mexico Indians were subsequently subjected to Mexican rule (1821-1848), U.S. Territorial control (1848-1912), and state control from 1912 (47th state). Four hundred and fifty years of inter-cultural conflict has delegated New Mexico's Indians to third-class status behind Hispanics and Blacks (second-class citizens), and Anglos (first-class citizens).

What, then, is the nature of the current "Indian problem"? Nationwide the Report of the Secretary's Task Force on Black and Minority Health and the Indian Health Service's recent report, Bridging the Gap, indicate that the primary causes of mortality among American Indians have shifted away from the infectious diseases toward chronic diseases. Accordingly, the death rate for American Indians ages 15 to 44 are nearly twice those of this age

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group within the total U.S. population. More specifically, the death rates for American Indians residing on reservations exceed the total U.S. population: 321% for alcoholism; 220% for tuberculosis; 139% for diabetes mellitus; 124% for unintentional injuries; 72% for homicide; and 34% for pneumonia and influenza. Recent studies indicate a state (New Mexico) suicide rate twice that of the national average--many of them American Indians.

The focus of the paper is on New Mexico's Indian children and youth and the formulation of viable, cultural-specific preventive programs. The state's 40,000 Indian students are the target of our overall intervention plan. Specifically, Western New Mexico University, (WNMU) a state facility, has been involved with the Gallup/McKinley school district and the BIA schools on the Navajo, Zuni and Hopi reservations. We offer graduate programs through the Department of Education and Psychology. Our graduate sites are located at Gallup, New Mexico and Chinle, Arizona. The former serves the Gallup/McKinley public school district and the Hopi and Zuni reservations while the Chinle campus serves Navajo BIA and public school districts. Part of our mandate is to assess unmet needs of the children and youth within these districts. Assessment and problem resolution are important components of our curricula development.

Demographically, the Gallup/McKinley School District is the largest in the United States comprised of 5,000 square miles (larger than New Jersey). Seventy three percent of the 12,000 population student body (K-12) are American Indians. Twenty-seven schools serve these students: 17 elementary schools, 4 middle schools, and 6 high schools. There are also eight BIA Boarding Schools located within the district. Over 800 teachers serve the Gallup/McKinley Schools District with about a 15% yearly turnover in teachers. Most of these who leave are special education teachers--many who have been hired on "waivers" (not trained or licensed as special education teachers). Our assessment of unique problems within the district include:

(a) a high incident of maternal drinking and fetal alcoholism among American Indian mothers;

(b) a high incident of depression and suicidal tendencies among Indian children and youth;

(c) a high incident of child abuse and neglect among American Indian children; and

(d) harmful involvement with drugs and alcohol either by the American Indian student him/herself or by significant others.

Moreover, a recent study of American Indian fifth graders strongly indicates the mislabeling of "exceptionalities" (EMR, LD, SED). Clearly this study of 222 Navajo fifth graders indicates inadequacy of the WISC-R norms as a screening device for American Indian children, especially Navajo children. Thus, instead of serving the intent of PL 94-142 (Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975) the wrongful labeling of American Indian children often has the opposite effect. When minority children are involved we see a situation of "double stigma"--being minority and educationally exceptional. Besides, this process exacerbates the high drop out rate among American Indian children and youth and the subsequent negative self-image, marginality and poverty (education, social/cultural, and economic)--factors leading to depression, alcoholism, violence and abuse.

We see this phenomenon as the American Indian equivalence to the Larry P. Riles controversy (1972, 1974, 1979, 1984) argued through the California and Federal Courts and pertaining to the mislabeling of other minority students as being inferior.

Assessment Issues Specific To The Navajo

It is clear that there are some important considerations in evaluating and counseling American Indian students. As Western thinkers, we are often challenged by the differences between tribal groups and the distinct differences within tribes (Tafoya, 1989). This has often created confusion when interpreting test scores in settings of variation in language, acculturation and socioeconomic conditions.

The Navajo Tribe represents the largest Native American Tribe in the United States with a population of 200,000 (NAIHS, 1990) encompassing three states. It has recently been reported that American Indians have the highest dropout rate of any ethnic group regardless of tribal membership (Sanders, 1987; Counterpoint, 1990). Specifically, between 28% to 60% of Navajo youth drop out of high school (Chan, 1983). These rates are

significantly higher than any other minority group in the country. This clearly suggests a need for examining the variables contributing to the reasons for serious educational difficulties and high dropout rates. The current issues impacting on identification and evaluation of Navajo children at risk are varied and complex.

The purpose of this study is to examine: a) specific Navajo acculturation variables creating culture conflict; b) socioeconomic issues creating extreme environmental trauma; c) specific testing bias issues resulting in inappropriate placement decisions; d)identify the high risk Navajo child profile based on the research data collected recently, and suggest implications based on research data. Finally, there are specific recommendations for interviewing, testing and counseling in the school setting to reduce the impact of further insult to the child and increase the possibility of academic achievement and self sufficiency. The goal is to provide earlier identification, assessment and intervention to give earlier support to Navajo children most at risk for lower achievement and early school withdrawal.

Identification of Stressors Contributing To Mental Health and Educational Difficulties of High Risk Navajo Children

Acculturation Stressors.

One identified stressor is adjustment of American Indian groups to off-reservation communities. For years American Indians have held on to their rich heritage and traditional beliefs. The Navajo people have a proud heritage and have resisted acculturation into the mainstream of American society. They often reject relinquishing their language, value system and the "Dineh" way of life. However, the cultural clash between the Navajo reservation experience and the surrounding communities can be intense and painful for many individuals (May & Van Winkle, 1986; Jordan, 1987).

Cultural conflict is defined as acculturation conflict when the interaction between cultures has led to mental health and education difficulties. Acculturation conflict has been identified as contributing to early school withdrawal (Chan, 1983), lower achievement (Tempest, 1987), suicide (May, 1982) and aggressive behavior (Jordan, 1987). Navajo families often find that they are experiencing severe stress with school expectations, medical health personnel and local non-reservation communities.

Boyce and Boyce (1983) attempted to define and measure culture conflict as acculturation effects among first grade students in a boarding school. They found children coming from families in culture conflict were at greater risk for serious health problems. In an exhaustive study by Navajo Area Indian Health Services (1983), they developed an acculturation instrument called the Traditionality Tool. The Traditionality Tool measured three levels of acculturation--(traditional, transitional, and modern) on 479 women at risk for child birth complications. They found major dissonance occurs within the transitional group (NAIHS, 1983). The transitional group often has more difficulty with treatment compliance, greater health problems and mortality.

Jordan (1987) adapted the Traditionality Tool into the Navajo Culture Questionnaire. This questionnaire measured levels of acculturation on 129 Navajo seniors at a boarding school. Again, transitional acculturation was found to be significantly related to self-predicted violence. Those students in the transitional group were experiencing severe conflict over school expectations, family belief and Navajo traditions.

Culture conflict has also been correlated to academic failure and early school withdrawal (Chan, 1983; Tempest, 1987). Chan's study suggested that students in conflict between Navajo traditions and more modern beliefs "experience greater school conflict and, thus, negative school outcomes" (p. 28). The Tempest study (1987) of 222 Navajo fifth graders found that Navajo children were penalized because of cultural, language and multiple health and environmental problems. She found Navajo learning profiles were distinctively different. Because of language and cultural differences the full scale WISC-R score is a biased measure that often places children in special education programs inappropriately.

Specific cultural determinants of lower achievement, early school dropout, suicide and violence have also been analyzed. Language background including language shift and language dominance can sometimes lead to serious difficulties in reading comprehension and writing in English. Often students are between English and Navajo without fluency in either language. In the Jordan study only 9% spoke English all the time, and 71% still speak Navajo. In the Jordan, Schau, Wilde & Swanson (1988) study, of 230 Navajo students in a public school, language was the strongest domain on their acculturation instrument. Those who like speaking English were less fluent in Navajo.

Chan (1983) found that students who come from mixed Navajo/English backgrounds, without established dominance are often at risk for dropping out of school. Many Navajo students express themselves in English to their teachers, however, do not have established fluency. They listen to the information in English and for more abstract concepts, they have to translate into Navajo. Rhodes (1989) suggests that Native American students often have difficulty with translating between their Native language and English. The American Indian student has to hear and understand the question in English and then translate that question into his own language to determine what the question really means and how it relates to his own reality. When he develops an answer, he sometimes translates that answer into English and finally determines whether it is appropriate to volunteer the answer, in front of his peers, to the teacher or if volunteering the answer will make him less than a team member" (p. 37). This process can be very frustrating and take considerable effort and time, it also can create distance and conflict between the learner and the teacher, school and community. Finally, this process can cause extreme difficulties and confusion understanding language and inhibit the acquisition of reading and writing skills. Vogt, Jordan and Tharp (1987) suggest that underachievement can be a critical mismatch between "the natal culture of the children and the culture of the children at points that are critical for school success" (p.276). It is not unusual for a Navajo speaking primary caretaker to provide a child with Navajo language definitions that are distinctly different from peers, and from English definitions expected at school. In short, there maybe extreme diversity in interpretation of language between members of family, peers, school, and community.

Socioeconomic Stressors.

In the past year John Gibbons, director of Congress Office of Technology (OTA) issued a report summmarizing the serious mental health crisis of Native American adolescents (Counterpoint, 1990). OTA reported that there are 397,000 children and adolescents served by Indian Health Services around the country. "Only 17 mental health providers who are trained to treat youngsters--a ratio of less than one-half a mental health provider for every 10,000 youngsters" (p. 20). It is evident that there is a critical shortage of staff to meet the impact of poverty, substance abuse, developmental disorders and family disruption. In a high risk group where there are more serious mental health problems than

in other U.S. populations, (OTA, 1990) there is a critical shortage of mental health care providers to treat these problems.

There is a growing concern in the Gallup and surrounding reservation communities regarding the escalation of delinquency, substance abuse, and suicidal behavior. Recently, Gallup received negative publicity over the impact of alcohol related problems in the community. The community attitude has been to address these problems with stronger strategies and interventions.

The Gallup McKinley County School District (GMSD) conducted an Incidence and Prevalence Survey (1984-85). The survey suggested the problem of substance abuse was escalating in the secondary schools throughout the district. In response to the survey and strong parental involvement, the school board voted to hire and train more counselors in all the schools in Gallup on and off the Navajo Reservation.

Each year, the GMSD has included more counselors to identify students who are:

(a) depressed and experiencing other emotional difficulties
(b) displaying symptoms of suicidal tendencies
(c) abused and neglected or
(d) experiencing problems with another's drinking or drug use or
(e) harmfully involved with drugs and alcohol

In addition, suicide rates among the Apache, Navajo and Pueblo, are rising steadily. Recent rates suggest that there are 39 per 100,000 for Native Americans, 28.5 per 100,000 Hispanics, and 20 per 100,000 for the rest of the population (GMSD, 1989).

Other community groups are concerned with the severity and intensity of the mental health problems. According to Navajo Area Indian Health Services (NAIHS) Director Michael Lincoln, and Marion Zonnis, M.D. Director, Navajo Area Mental Health, the National Public Health Service has increased the mental health budget by 20% in the next fiscal year. Budget increases have been designated for more treatment specialists and more training for Native American counselors. NAIHS has approached Western New Mexico University regarding developing a counseling program for their mental health specialists.

Other socioeconomic stressors relating to educational and mental health problems have been documented. Tempest (1988) related the following environmental factors as con-

tributing to underachievement. In her longitudinal study the following factors were considered to be stressors:

1. Environmental Factors
   (a) 12% had no means of transportation
   (b) 39% had no running water
   (c) 17% had no electricity
2. Emotional Trauma Factors
   (a) 45% had experienced divorce
   (b) 57% experienced alcoholism
   (c) 7% death in the immediate family
   (d) 17% violence in the home
3. Physical Problems
   (a) 5% had malnutrition
   (b) 4% had meningitis
   (c) 49% had ear disease
   (d) 14% had gastroenteritis

Other socioeconomic factors were identified by the Gallup McKinley School District, July 1989. They compiled the profile of special education students with a primary exceptionality of Behavior Disordered in the GMSD. Of this group, 57.14% are American Indian. They found 57% of students lived in a home other than their own (a biological parent was unable to be the primary caretaker). Students lived in the following situations:

(a) Living with grandparents (33.9%)
(b) Living with other relatives (16.4%)
(c) Living in a foster home (9%)
(d) Living in a public institution (21.8%)
(e) Living with neighbors (3.6%)

* *(Placements with relatives were due to abandonment by the parent(s), death of the parents, or ability of the parent(s) to be responsible for student because of substance abuse problems. In many cases, the relatives were elderly.)*

(f) History of alcohol abuse in the family reported (58%)

Persons reported as abusing alcohol:

father (32.7%)
mother (25.4%)
relatives (23.6%)

stepfather/boyfriend (7.2%)

(g) History of Drug Abuse in the family (11%)

(h) Indications of Sexual Abuse in records (16%)

This profile suggests the evidence that socioeconomic and familial problems are taking their toll on the children and adolescents in these families. In the past five years, there has been a dramatic increase in behavior disorders identified by the Gallup McKinley County Schools and Navajo Reservation Schools. Many of the special educators suggest that socioeconomic and family disruption are primary causes of serious behavior problems. Further, it is hypothesized that the Behavior Disordered category is more related to conduct disorders resulting from environmental factors and family trauma.

Identification of Educational Testing Bias Issues

It is a bleak picture when one examines the educational outcome of Native American students. Rhodes (1989) reports that the American Indian on the reservation scores lower on achievement tests in the public schools and the Navajo and other reservations throughout the country. He quotes the study of Bishop (1988) that show "Indian students in Arizona score consistently in the 20 and 30 percentile ranges in reading and math and in the 30 and 40 percentile ranges in language (p 33). He suggests that learning styles of Native Americans should be analyzed and researched as a possible explanation for learning difficulties. He proposes that Native American students perceive information in more "holistic, intuitive, feeling, concrete experience end of the continuum than toward the abstract conceptualization end" (p. 40). However, the teacher expectations tend to be action-oriented, abstract and more linear.

In the Tempest follow up Navajo study (1989) she identified significant differences between those in the original study of 222 Navajo students who graduated and those who dropped out of school. Graduates were different in the WISC-R in the following subtests:

Information (5.4 ± 0.3 vs. 4.4 ± 0.4, ($p = .05$)

Comprehension (6.1 ± 0.2 vs. 5.3 ± 0.3, ($p = .05$)

Object Assembly (10.5 ± 0.3 vs. 10.6 ± 0.4, ($p = .05$)

WISC-R Performance I.Q. (102.3 ± 1.3 vs. 96.7 ± 2.2 ($p = .05$)

WISC-R FS IQ (86.2 ± 1.2 vs. 81.0 ± 2.1, ($p = .05$)

Graduates tended to be female (p.05) have transportation, attend chapter meetings (p.05), wore traditional dress (p.05) and they did not experience divorce (p.001).

In her earlier study, she summarized that Navajo students begin school with a WISC-R Vocabulary score of 6.9, a WISC-R Verbal score of 84.4 and a WISC-R Performance score of 107.8. At 14 years, 11 months of age the Navajo student has a WISC-R Vocabulary score of 4.8, a WISC-R Verbal score of 75.6 and a WISC-R Performance score of 102. It is evident that the difference between the Verbal and Performance scores do not significantly change. Those students with lower verbal scores consistently score lower on other verbal tests of intelligence. Further, at 14 years and 11 months, they read at 5.98 grade level, spell at 5.16 grade level and have math skills at 4.75 grade level according to the Wide Range Achievement Test.

Based on her study of 317 Navajo students, she divided equally in cells of 4 months from 6 years and 0 months to 14 years and 11 months from a stratified sample of Navajo students from eight public schools in the county. Navajo norms for the WISC-R were developed. The profile of the average Navajo fifth grader was the following:

WISC-R	General Population	Navajo
Information	5	10
Similarities	6	10
Arithmetic	7	10
Vocabulary	4	10
Comprehension	6	10
Digit Span	6	10
Picture Completion	9	10
Picture Arrangement	9	10
Block Design	10	10
Object Assembly	11	10
Coding	11	10
Verbal	73	100
Performance	100	100
Full Scale	84	100

It is evident from studies of Rhodes (1989) and Tempest (1981, 1987, 1989) that the learning style and learning profiles are significantly different for Navajo children. They tend to process information more holistically, intuitively and are more reflective in their problem solving. Further, there is a significant 27.7 difference between WISC-R Verbal and Performance scores according to Tempest (1987). "They have strengths in spatial, perceptual organization and nonverbal sequencing. They have difficulties in auditory conceptualization, verbal comprehension and verbal sequencing" (p. 37). Generally, auditory processing is related to phonetic synthesis and reading achievement. Therefore, many Navajo students have difficulty achieving much past the fifth grade.

Identification of High Risk Navajo Child

Based on recent research of Jordan (1987) and Tempest (1987, 1989) there are significant variables that identify the Navajo child most at risk. These variables are critically important in assessment of Navajo children because they signal more serious acculturation difficulties, family problems and environmental isolation and poverty. (See Figure 1).

FIGURE 1
Profile of High Risk Navajo Child
Assessment of the High Risk Child:
Warning Signs

Acculturation Factors

* *No established dominance in either English or Navajo Language.*
* *Lack of knowledge of his Navajo traditions, clan.*
* *Frequent changes in residence.*
* *Repeated moves from one community to another.*
* *Lack of involvement in the local chapter or any other community.*

Familial Factors

* *Lack of bonding with either parent. Living with relative, foster care.*
* *Absence of reciprocal interaction between parent and child.*
* *Recent divorce in child's life.*
* *Lack of contact with non-custodial parent.*
* *Recent death of any member of immediate family (mother, father, sibling).*
* *Family members have high incidence of frequent illness.*
* *Abuse of alcohol and drugs by mother and or father (more risk if it is mother)*

Socioeconomic Factors

* *Financial support is from a public agency.*
* *Lack of running water.*
* *Lack of electricity.*
* *Lack of transportation.*
* *Isolation from surrounding Chapter community.*
* *Significant distance from main road access to town and school.*

Implications

There are some important steps in completing an adequate assessment for Navajo students. It is VERY important to identify the high risk child in order to intervene at an earlier period to provide an intensive prevention program.

1. *Give a Comprehensive Interview.* The first step is to determine the level of acculturation conflict by using a comprehensive interview. The interviewer needs to address the issues of variance within the Navajo culture including language and traditional values, socioeconomic factors and family disruption.

These questions have been studied in various settings (NAIHS, 1983; Jordan, 1987; Jordan et al. 1988; Tempest, 1990). They have determined the factors contributing to the high risk child coming from a family in conflict between the Reservation expectations and community around them. It is recommended that a child in a more traditional to transitional setting should be compared to children on the Navajo Reservation with similar learning profiles. The Questionnaire can determine the traditionality of the students and the impact of cultural factors on testing results and academic outcome.

2. *Take all steps to avoid testing bias.* Testing bias must be analyzed and avoided when interpreting test scores. Navajo children tend to score lower on standardized verbal tests regardless of their strengths and weaknesses and overall learning profile. The Verbal WISC-R and Full Scale WISC-R scores are influenced by language, cultural and environmental factors (Teeter, Moore and Peterson, 1982, McCullough, Walker and Diessner 1985; Tempest, 1987). The full scale WISC-R is a misleading score for Navajo children and should not be used as a criteria for placement into special programs. The Performance WISC-R score is the least biased score and the most reliable measure of learning potential. Further, Tempest (1987) found a significant 27.7 point difference between Verbal WISC-R and Performance WISC-R scores for Navajo children. Therefore, a wide discrepancy between Verbal and Performance scores is not an unusual outcome and is not reflecting a learning disability profile.

It is also recommended that Navajo norms for WISC-R be used with general population norms to ensure proper educational placement for Navajo students. If students who are

similar to their average Navajo counterpart are placed in special education, their specific needs may not be met and they are often inappropriately labeled. The norms developed by Tempest (1987) can facilitate a better understanding for the typical Navajo student, while providing a frame of reference for considerations about the educationally handicapped.

3. Analyze the learning style. The learning style also should be analyzed as an important part of the testing. Recent research suggests that specific methodologies such as whole language and other holistic approaches are recommended. There is also a need to focus on visual spatial perceptual organizational strengths in all areas of curriculum.

It is also important to recognize the fact that Navajo children speak softer and at a slower rate. As with other American Indian groups, they tend to avoid direct identification between the listener and speaker and look away to avoid eye contact. Further, students should be allowed ample reflective time and opportunities for longer incubation times to process information (Rhodes, 1989). Approaches which require immediate verbal abstract responses are going to be very difficult for the Navajo youngster caught between two languages. Often, these approaches can be very frustrating and widen the gap of achievement level and learning potential.

4. Determine the appropriate counseling intervention models. It is also important to assess the impact of socioeconomic stressors and family disruption on the mental health of the child. In the Jordan (1987) study, she found a significant level of powerlessness and self blame within many adolescents for family problems. Examples of negative self statements as to why they were hit by their partner were the following: "I did something wrong; I went to the movies by myself." She related these self defeating statements to the Abramson (1978) attributional theory of causality of uncontrollable events. Attribution of negative events to uncontrollability leads to pervasive helplessness. She concluded that many high risk adolescents live in distressed families and perceive serious problems as uncontrollable. This leads to symptoms of intense anxiety and depression.

The level of anxiety and depression needs to be evaluated to determine if the child or adolescent is in need of therapy. As a result of the Jordan study, an intervention program of cognitive therapy was implemented at Window Rock School District in 1988 with high

risk Navajo children ages 8 to 12. It was an attempt to intervene with high risk children at earlier stages in development. Depressogenic cognitions were restructured using cognitive therapy and attributional retraining of consequences and causes of events. It was evident after pre and post testing that this approach seems to be most effective with children exhibiting moderate to severe symptoms of depression.

Another approach that has been successful is problem solving sequential steps to improve mastery over the environment. The high risk Navajo child often perceives the world as a dangerous place and does not have the tools to overcome even the smallest conflicts. Low self esteem is also related to powerlessness and becomes a significant problem in junior high grades and persists throughout high school (Tempest, 1987). Low self esteem and powerlessness was approached by an intervention program developed by Tempest and the Gallup Mckinley School District. They developed a program they called RULES, which is a step by step program to help with problem solving. There are five steps:

R - Respect is step one of problem solving
U - Understanding the problem
L - List the possible solutions
E - Elect a solution you are willing to try
S - Share situation with trusted friend

They have documented reduction in anxiety, greater motivation and higher achievement scores with children that have been involved with RULES in intervention class.

Summary

There are clearly some specific acculturalion, socioeconomic and educational, variables that have impacted on American Indian students. Specifically, the Navajo child in various parts of the extensive Navajo Reservation often has been a victim of environmental trauma and testing bias. However, the Gallup Mckinley School District and Window Rock Scool District have significantly improved their identification evaluation and counseling of Navajo children at risk. Currently, Gallup Mckinley School District is working in coordination with

Western New Mexico University to develop an early identification and prevention plan based on integration of recent research. They have developed the profile of the high risk Navajp child to determine factors that should be examined at the earliest educational opportunity. Certainly, they are on the right track with the research and development of Navajo norms resulting in more accurate Navajo testing profiles. It is also evident that the intensive counseling program developed in conjunction with Western New Mexico University has also provided more services to impact on the child in the educational setting. What is needed is a coordinated intensive early prevention plan based on comprehensive family interviews, Navajo norms, specific learning styles, and cross cultural intervention models.

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ABSTRACT

ASSESSING AMERICAN INDIAN NEEDS IN NEW MEXICO

American Indians have a disporportionately high incident of social and health problems. New Mexico's American Indian population is represented by Pueblos, Apaches, and Navajo with Gallup being the major attraction this the largest concentration of American Indians in the Nation. Our paper, focusing on the Gallup/McKinley School District (largest in the U. S. with 73% Indians), assesses the needs of American Indian children and youth (and their families) with the intent of developing early interventions. A significant recent finding was the mislabeling of Indian children as being learning disabled. We see this as an Indian example of the Larry P v Riles situation in California.